

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 09590 011249Z

ACTION AF-08

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1303

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 09590

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT CF FR

SUBJ: FURTHER QUAI ASSESSMENT OF CONGO

REF: PARIS 8796 (NOTAL)

1. QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA CHRISTIAN DE LA ROCHERE TOLD US MAR 31 THAT THE FRENCH REMAIN PERPLEXED BY WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CONGO WHERE TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH. MILITARY COMMITTEE DECLARATIONS APPEAR TO HAVE GONE BEYOND THE ORIGINAL THEME THAT "IMPERIALISM AT BAY" WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR EVENTS AND ARE NOW SOUNDING THE NOTE THAT "THE ASSASSINS ARE AMONG US".

2. SEVERAL "CONFIDENTIAL" SOURCES INDICATE THAT ETHNIC BATTLES ARE IMMINENT, LA ROCHERE CONTINUED, ALTHOUGH NO ONE HAS YET DRAWN HIS REVOLVER. THERE ALSO ARE INDICATIONS THAT KIKADIDI DID NOT KILL NGOUABI BUT WAS FRAMED, ALTHOUGH THIS IS NOT CLEAR. THE SOVIET/ CUBAN ROLE ALSO IS UNCLEAR, BUT THE FRENCH BELIEVE THAT IT WAS NOT A PRIMARY ONE AND THAT IN ANY CASE, THE SITUATION NOW HAS GONE BEYOND THEIR CONTROL.

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3. SPECULATING ON THE MOTIVATION FOR ELIMINATING NGOUABI, LA ROCHERE SAID THE FRENCH ARE NOT SURE THAT HIS RECENT TURN TOWARDS THE WEST WAS RESPONSIBLE. RATHER, THEY NOW TEND TO CONSIDER THAT THE NORTHERN OFFICERS ACTED OUT OF FEAR OF BEING REMOVED FROM POWER DURING THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS.

4. ON BILATERAL RELATIONS, LA ROCHERE SAID THAT THE MILITARY COMMITTEE DOMINATED BY NORTHERNERS SO FAR HAS BROKEN NOTHING WITH FRANCE AND IS CONTINUING NGOUABI'S POLICIES. IN CONSEQUENCE, FRANCE WILL BE REPRESENTED BY A MINISTER AT THE APRIL 2 FUNERAL. THE FRENCH PLAN TO BE AS SUPPLE AS POSSIBLE AND ARE CONSIDERING GRANTING THE NEW REGIME A BUDGETARY SUBSIDY TO MEET THE END OF MARCH PAYROLL. THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, HOWEVER, HAS YET TO BE CONVINCED.

5. NEGOTIATIONS ON THE POTASSIUM AND OIL COMPANY PROBLEMS ARE GOING FORWARD. ON POTASSIUM, LA ROCHERE SAID THAT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT A FRENCH ENGINEER MADE A COLOSSAL BLUNDER IN ASSESSING CONGO'S POTENTIAL. HENCE, THE FRENCH ARE INCLINED TO OFFER TO HAND OVER WITHOUT INDEMNIFICATION ALL OF THE POTASSIUM INSTALLATIONS AND IN RESPONSE TO CONGOLESE DEMANDS FOR COMPENSATION, TO OFFER BUDGETARY SUPPORT. SUCH SUPPORT COULD BE REDUCED GRADUALLY TO NOTHING OVER A PERIOD OF FIVE OR SIX YEARS WHEREAS CONTINUING THE POTASSIUM OPERATION WOULD MEAN HAVING TO MEET DEFICITS PERMANENTLY.

6. THE CONGOLESE, WHILE STILL "TOUGH", ARE BEING RATHER FLEXIBLE IN THE ON-GOING NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELF, LA ROCHERE SAID. THERE IS A GOOD POSSIBILITY THAT THEY CAN BE PERSUADED TO REMOVE THE HEAVY NEW TAXATION THAT CAUSED ELF TO OPERATE IN THE RED, WITH ELF PAYING AN "ADVANCE", WHICH IN REALITY WOULD BE A "GIFT", BUT WHICH

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WOULD PERMIT THE OIL FIRM TO AVOID FUTURE OPERATING LOSSES IN THE CONGO. LA ROCHERE NOTED THAT THE REMARKABLY OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE OIL SITUATION MADE AT CONGOLESE REQUEST BY ALGERIAN SONATRACH ENGINEERS HAD STRENGTHENED ELF'S NEGOTIATING POSITION.
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